

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NIAMEY 00211 140713Z

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /066 W

-----140716Z 038509 /11

R 131615Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5771

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 0211

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NG, FR

SUBJECT: FRANCO-AFRICAN DAKAR CONFERENCE

REF: STATE 2032

1. SINCE KOUNTCHE BEGAN, ABOUT A YEAR AGO, TO ARTICULATE TO US HIS DEEP CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET PENETRATION AND ABOUT THE APPARENTLY INCREASING INABILITY OF AFRICA -- POOR, WEAK AND OFTEN IRRESOLUTE -- TO GET ALONG WITHOUT AN INCREASED U.S. AND WESTERN COMMITMENT, WE HAVE BEEN LOOKINGFOR SIGNS THAT ENHANCED MILITARY ARRANGEMENTS WITH FRANCE, WITH OTHER AFRICANS, OR WITH BOTH,MIGHT BE UNDER CONSIDERATION. SO FAR, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE FROM GON OR FROM FRENCH HERE THAT SIGNIFICANTLY STEPPED-UP SECURITY COOPERATION IS IN
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PAGE 02 NIAMEY 00211 140713Z

PROSPECT. FRENCH ARMS DELIVERIES TO NIGER COULD GROW SLIGHTLY TO MEET RECURRENT NEEDS, BUT IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT SIGNIFICANTLY EXPANDED PROGRAMS ARE BEING CONTEMPLATED BY GON OR FRENCH MISSION IN RESPONSE TO NEW STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES.

2. FRENCH MILITARY PROGRAMS WHICH PROVIDE SOME 60

TECHNICIANS, EQUIPMENT, AND TRAINING OF NIGERIESE OFFICERS IN FRANCE WILL CONTINUE. UNDERPINNINGS FOR SUCH COOPERATION WITH FRANCE MAY ALSO BE PUT ON A MORE FORMAL BASIS WHEN NEW BILATERAL ASSISTANCE ACCORDS, LONG UNDER NEGOTIATION, ARE FINALLY CONCLUDED. NEW ASSISTANCE ACCORDS WITH FRANCE ARE REPORTEDLY VERY NEAR COMPLETION. IN ADDITION WE WOULD EXPECT THAT, GIVEN NIGER'S IMPROVED FINANCIAL PROSPECTS DERIVING FROM URANIUM AND ITS GENERALLY FAVORABLE BALANCE OF PAYMENTS POSITION, NEW CASH PURCHASES OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT MAY BE UNDERTAKEN IN NOT TOO Distant FUTURE TO IMPROVE SOME OF ARMY'S BASIC EQUIPMENT WHICH SEEMS OUTDATED AND IN BAD CONDITION.

3. BEYOND THAT, HOWEVER, FROM NIGER'S POINT OF VIEW, THERE APPEAR TO BE IMPORTANT RESTRAINTS ON PARTICIPATING IN SUBSTANTIALLY EXPANDED PROGRAM OF REGIONAL SECURITY IN COOPERATION WITH FRANCE AND FRANCOPHONE NEIGHBORS. OVERALL, KOUNTCHE SEEMS TO SEE SOVIET THREAT AND AFRICAN WEAKNESS MORE FROM A POLITICAL THAN A MILITARY PERSPECTIVE. HE HAS ALWAYS EMPHASIZED THAT WESTERN ROLE SHOULD BE TO ASSIST AFRICANS WITH THEIR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUT HAS NEVER MENTIONED MILITARY ASSISTANCE DURING PERIODIC OVERVIEWS OF AFRICAN SECURITY PROBLEMS. INTERNALLY, MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL BUT ARMS-LENGTH DEALINGS WITH FRANCE, AS SYMBOLIZED BY REMOVAL OF FRENCH GARRISON IN 1974, ARE STILL PORTRAYED AS MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PRESENT GOVERNMENT DESPITE KOUNTCHE'S ADMIRATION FOR AND SIMILARITY OF VIEWS WITH SENEGAL AND HOUPHOUËT, ANYTHING SUGGESTION PARTICIPATION IN THE MILITARY ARRANGEMENTS WHICH THEY SHARE WITH FRANCE WOULD BE A DOMESTIC POLITICAL LIABILITY FOR

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PAGE 03 NIAMEY 00211 140713Z

KOUNTCHE REGIME. FINALLY, DESPITE WHAT KOUNTCHE SAYS ABOUT MALI AND BENIN LEADERSHIP, HE SEES NO DIRECT THREAT FROM EITHER, NOR DOES HE HAVE OTHER SECURITY PROBLEMS FOR WHICH COOPERATION WITH FRANCOPHONES WOULD BE A SOLUTION. NIGER'S PROXIMITY TO NIGERIA AND ITS BUFFER POSITION BETWEEN NORTH AND BLACK AFRICAN STATES PLACE IT IN SPECIAL SITUATION NOT SHARED BY OTHER FRANCOPHONES AND IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW ENHANCED COOPERATION WITH LATTER WOULD BUTTRESS KOUNTCHE'S POSITION OR HELP GUARANTEE MORE THAN A VERY SMALL PORTION OF COUNTRY'S BORDERS.

4. THEREFORE, OUR GUESS WOULD BE THAT KOUNTCHE WILL WISH TO AVOID TOO CLOSE IDENTIFICATION WITH FRENCH OR AFRICAN FRANCOPHONES ON MILITARY COOPERATION, BUT THAT HE WILL HEW TO POLICY OF SEEKING POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING WITH BOTH ARAB AND BLACK AFRICAN NEIGHBORS, WHILE OBTAINING BULK OF ARMS AND MILITARY SUPPLIES NECESSARY TO MAINTAINING AN INDEPENDENT POSITION QUIETLY AND ON BILATERAL BASIS FROM FRANCE AS HE HAS DONE SO FAR. DAVISON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SPHERE OF INFLUENCE, FOREIGN RELATIONS, COLLECTIVE SECURITY
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 13-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977NIAEMEY00211
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770014-0442
Format: TEL
From: NIAEMEY
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770155/aaaabwao.tel
Line Count: 116
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 761205da-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 STATE 2032
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3606847
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRANCO-AFRICAN DAKAR CONFERENCE
TAGS: PFOR, NG, FR, UR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/761205da-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009